

WHAT IS THE HIGHER CRITICISM?

A correspondent asks us to define for him what is meant by the "higher criticism." The term is somewhat vague, and capable of various definitions. But there are some clear characters that may be noted. There are three forms of criticism, the lower, the higher, and the radical. The two latter are often confused.

The lower criticism has to do with the exact text of the Bible. In early centuries the Scripture was preserved through copies made with the pen. Not all the copyists were perfect. Special efforts were made to secure the greatest accuracy, yet some minor variations crept into the manuscript copies of the Bible. Most of them are as slight as would be the spelling in English of the word honor with or without the letter "u." A few are more important. The lower criticism undertakes to compare the various manuscripts and take notice of any various readings that may be found.

The higher criticism proper undertakes to consider questions of authorship, of date, etc. To illustrate: At the close of each one of the Epistles of Paul, in the ordinary copies of the Testament, we find a subscription, which reads, "Written from" such a place. These subscriptions were not written by Paul, but by some copyist. Not all of them correspond to the contents of the epistle. The first epistle to the Corinthians is marked as "written from Philippi." But the contents of 1 Corinthians 16: 19 and of 2 Corinthians 12: 12 and 13, intimate that the first epistle was written weeks before Paul came to Philippi. Of such a fact as this the higher criticism would take notice. So also the higher critic considers the testimony of the ancient fathers as to the fact that this book or that one was accepted by the early Church as inspired. Such is the sphere of the higher criticism.

Over and beyond this is another which we call the radical criticism, which some men mean when they say higher criticism. It endeavors to bring the sacred Scriptures to the test of our rationalistic conclusions. We have seen that the real higher criticism brings them to the test of historical facts; the radical criticism to the test of human opinions, as to what is probable concerning the origin of this or that book.

The radical criticism questions whether there was ever such a person as Noah on earth. It doubts whether Abraham ever lived. It hesitates about accepting the Pentateuch as the work of Moses, and holds that it was written about the time of the Babylonian captivity. It opens the inquiry whether the narrative of the Garden of Eden and of Adam's sin and of the covenant of redemption (found in the third chapter of Genesis) is anything more than a myth or a legend. Nay, it goes so far as to deny that Jesus was born of a virgin, or that he was more than a mere man, and reduces his precious teachings and miracles to the regions of doubt.

It bases these questionings not on historical facts or testimonies, but simply on the fancies of the critic. It finds in the first chapter of Genesis that God is described by the Hebrew word Elohim, and in the second chapter by the Hebrew word Jehovah, and at once avers that the two chapters could not both have proceeded from the pen of Moses. (A conclusion that

is foolish indeed, as soon as one considers the difference in the theme of the two chapters, for the first chapter tells of creation and the second of God's covenant.) And it proceeds to split up the sacred narratives into innumerable fanciful sections, till the patience of the pious reader of the Bible is exhausted.

An example of its teachings is found in a sermon of Rev. Prof. Wenley, of the University of Michigan, in which he said:

"Does Christianity depend on incidents, many of which have been proven thoroughly false, others absurd, and still more may be exploded any day? . . . For religion we must apply to our religious consciousness, even if, in the process, we lose Christianity."

The effect of the radical criticism is to destroy all reverence for the Bible and by denying its inspiration to leave us without any infallible guide for our lives. Its highest conclusion is that the Bible is not the Word of God, but only that it contains the Word of God, leaving the poor bewildered reader to discover what parts are inspired and safe for him to follow and what are not. It is to undermine our faith in the Word of God and to leave us at sea as to vital matters respecting salvation. It is one of the worst foes with which vital piety has to meet. In some parts of this country it has found many followers and has marred the usefulness of many a pastor.

In one of our exchanges last week we saw two articles. One urged the conclusion that Abraham was only a myth; the other informed us that the membership of Christian Endeavor in New England is on the decline. While yet another article in a New York paper tells us that the number of candidates for the ministry is woefully low. No wonder! This decay in church life is the natural fruitage of the radical criticism.

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A MULTITUDE A SAD SIGHT.

It is an old story of the classics that Xerxes was happy when first he looked upon his great army. His ships covered and hid the waters of the Hellespont, and a vast multitude of men crowded the coast of Abydos. He was happy in the sense of power, and in the hope of conquest and glory. But a moment after he burst into tears. When asked by his uncle, Artabanus, why he wept, he said that it was because all of this multitude would so soon die, and not one be living in a hundred years. But Artabanus said it was not human mortality that moved him, but the sadness of human life; not that all of these men would die, but that all would be pressed by care and sorrow.

Matthew tells that when our Lord saw the multitude that followed him, having nothing to eat for three days, he had compassion on them. And Mark gives the great reason, "they were as sheep not having a shepherd."

They were ignorant and wandering, with no one to guide and protect them and bring them to a safe fold. They were soon to die and knew nothing of an unwasting and everlasting hope. They were burdened with want and cares, and sorrows, and knew not where to go for comfort. And beneath all this they were sinful, and had no one to point them to the only Savior of sinners. It was not the shortness of life, nor the hun-